



Candidate Information Pack

Financial Controller

Lead COEL's employed Finance function and help shape operational performance as a full member of the Operational Leadership Team. This is a visible, hands-on leadership opportunity to build on existing Finance capability, strengthen project accounting, forecasting, reporting and controls, and help colleagues across the business make timely, well-informed decisions.

Why this role matters

COEL is seeking a Finance leader who can help the business maintain clear visibility of performance, respond promptly and make well-informed decisions. In our project-based environment, effective project financial control and close collaboration between Finance, Commercial and project delivery directly influence margin, cash and risk. The Financial Controller will have the access and influence to build on these connections, develop the Finance team and contribute to a forward-looking and resilient function.

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Executive Summary

This is an opportunity to build on COEL's established Finance capability and strengthen how the function supports the next stage of the business's development. As the senior employed Finance leader and a full member of the Operational Leadership Team, the Financial Controller will provide continuity in day-to-day financial leadership, influence business-wide priorities and work visibly across Finance, Commercial, procurement, project delivery and leadership. The role combines hands-on financial leadership with the opportunity to improve decision quality, develop team capability and introduce sustainable improvements at a pace the business can absorb.

The opportunity is significant. COEL is seeking a Finance leader who can build on established CVR and WIP disciplines, develop forecasting and decision-useful reporting, maintain proportionate controls and strengthen Finance team capability. The successful candidate will connect financial insight to the commercial and operational life of projects, helping colleagues protect margin, manage cash and act earlier.

COEL is continuing to develop its systems, processes and management disciplines. The successful candidate will be supported to understand the current position, build strong relationships and agree priorities according to risk, value and organisational capacity. The emphasis will be on purposeful, sustainable progress that protects dependable day-to-day delivery rather than immediate wholesale change.

The opportunity

To build on COEL's existing Finance capability and develop a resilient, commercially connected function that gives the Board and leadership team confidence in the numbers and timely visibility of likely future performance.

About COEL

COEL is a Cambridge-based commercial design, build, fit-out and construction business. We operate in a project-based environment where project performance, cost control, cash, margin and timely decision-making are closely connected.

Our work requires collaboration between Finance, Commercial, pre-construction, procurement, project delivery and leadership. Strong financial information helps us protect value, manage risk, support clients and make better decisions about projects and the wider business.

Company Culture, Vision and Values

COEL promotes a values-led, high-performance culture where people are encouraged to take ownership, act responsibly, work collaboratively and improve the business. We are practical, supportive and hands-on. We value clear thinking, sound judgement, accountability, mutual respect and a willingness to get involved where help is needed.

The Financial Controller will need to combine high standards with a constructive approach. Success will depend on building trust across Finance, Commercial, project teams and leadership, understanding operational realities and challenging information without creating a policing culture.

- ✓ Technically credible and commercially minded.
- ✓ Practical rather than bureaucratic.
- ✓ Comfortable moving between detailed investigation and strategic insight.
- ✓ Able to challenge constructively and explain financial issues clearly.
- ✓ Committed to developing people as well as improving process.
- ✓ Calm, resilient and dependable when priorities compete.



How we expect Finance to work

Finance at COEL is expected to remain closely connected to projects and decisions, combine accuracy with forward-looking insight, and apply rigour in a practical and proportionate way.

Role Profile

Headline Information

Job title	Financial Controller
Role type	Full time, primarily office based, with one day per week working from home
Reporting to	Fractional Finance Director
Location	Cambridge head office, with regular engagement with project and operational teams
Salary	£80,000–£83,000 depending on experience
Benefits	Pension and healthcare cash plan
Professional qualification	ACA, ACCA, or CIMA qualified

Purpose of the Role

The title Financial Controller reflects COEL's requirement for strong financial control combined with active operational leadership. This is the senior employed Finance role in the business, with responsibility for leading the Finance team and contributing as a full member of the Operational Leadership Team. The Financial Controller will own day-to-day Finance leadership and delivery, influence business-wide decisions and work closely with colleagues across Commercial, procurement and project delivery. The Fractional Finance Director will provide strategic oversight, specialist advice, Board support and professional challenge. Clear priorities and open communication between the two roles will enable the Financial Controller to operate with appropriate authority and accountability.

The Financial Controller will lead COEL's day-to-day Finance function and management-information agenda. The role will be accountable for ensuring that financial records, project information, forecasts, controls and reporting are accurate, timely, proportionate and useful for decision-making. As a member of the Operational Leadership Team, the Financial Controller will contribute to business-wide priorities and bring financial insight and constructive challenge to operational decisions.

Why This Role Exists

COEL is moving into the next stage of its operational development. As the business evolves, the Financial Controller will support consistent and timely project accounting, CVRs, WIP, forecasting, management reporting and controls, while developing team capability and maintaining close alignment between operational forecasts and the financial position.

As a full member of the Operational Leadership Team, the Financial Controller will contribute beyond the Finance agenda. They will participate actively in collective decision-making, take shared responsibility for operational performance, bring evidence-based challenge to business-wide priorities and follow through on agreed actions. Success will require curiosity about how the business operates, visible engagement with colleagues and a willingness to support decisions once made.

The Financial Controller will translate these priorities into a dependable Finance operating rhythm, making relevant information readily accessible to leaders and project teams and ensuring that material financial implications are understood early.

Core proposition

Support COEL's financial clarity, control and foresight through effective project accounting, forecasting and reporting, proportionate processes and continued development of Finance team capability.

What makes the role distinctive

This role combines hands-on financial leadership with meaningful influence over project performance, commercial decision-making and business improvement. The Financial Controller will work closely with the Managing Director, Fractional Finance Director, Board, Operational Leadership Team, Commercial colleagues and project-delivery teams to strengthen margin protection, cash visibility, forecasting and decision quality.

- ✓ A material influence on margin protection, cash visibility and decision quality.
- ✓ A combination of hands-on financial control and forward-looking business insight.
- ✓ The opportunity to improve routines, data quality, systems use and team capability.
- ✓ Close collaboration with project, commercial, procurement and leadership colleagues.
- ✓ A clear mandate to strengthen control without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

It is a role centred on clarity, ownership, capability and sustainable control: maintaining the discipline that protects the business, applying it practically to support delivery and using forward-looking insight to improve decisions.

The balance of the role

The role combines dependable financial control, statutory discipline and month-end delivery with forward-looking insight, operational engagement and team leadership. The Financial Controller will remain sufficiently close to the detail to understand risk and assure quality, while developing clear ownership across the team and avoiding unnecessary dependency on one individual. Controls should protect the business and support effective delivery, not create avoidable complexity.

How the Role Is Weighted

Area	Indicative weighting	Purpose
Project accounting, CVRs and WIP	25%	Strengthen trusted project financial information and active ownership of WIP, risk and margin.
Forecasting, budgeting and cash visibility	20%	Build reliable forward views of revenue, cost, margin and cash.
Financial control, statutory discipline and month-end	20%	Maintain current, repeatable and proportionate core controls and close processes.
Management information, reporting and insight	15%	Provide concise analysis that explains performance, outlook and action required.
Team leadership, systems and process improvement	15%	Build capability, resilience, clearer ownership and more effective use of systems.
Business partnering, Board and adviser support	5%	Connect Finance to decisions and manage key external relationships.

The weighting is indicative rather than rigid. Priorities will vary through the month, project cycle and year. Project accounting, forward visibility and core control will remain central, but the Financial Controller's contribution as a full member of the Operational Leadership Team, visible business partner and leader of the Finance function applies across every area of responsibility rather than being confined to a single percentage allocation.

Key Relationships

- ✓ Managing Director, Board, Fractional Finance Director and fellow members of the Operational Leadership Team.
- ✓ Commercial and pre-construction leadership.
- ✓ Project managers, quantity surveyors and site-based delivery colleagues.
- ✓ Procurement and business support teams.
- ✓ The Financial Controller will lead the employed Finance team. The detailed team structure and individual reporting lines will be explained to shortlisted candidates during the recruitment process.
- ✓ External accountants, auditors, tax advisers, banks and other professional advisers where relevant.

Key Areas of Responsibility

Financial control and accounting

1. Financial Control, Statutory Discipline and Month-End

- ✓ Maintain a controlled and dependable financial foundation, with clear ownership, evidence and timetables.
- ✓ Lead an accurate, timely and well-controlled month-end close.
- ✓ Maintain current balance-sheet reconciliations, control accounts, approvals and audit trails.
- ✓ Ensure statutory, tax and regulatory information is prepared and coordinated with external advisers where required.
- ✓ Maintain effective cash, banking, payment and authorisation controls.
- ✓ Identify control gaps early and implement proportionate improvements without unnecessary bureaucracy.
- ✓ Ensure financial records support both statutory requirements and reliable management information.

2. Project Accounting, CVRs and WIP

- ✓ Act as steward of COEL's project financial information, maintaining disciplined CVR and WIP practices, strengthening ownership and ensuring the information remains a reliable basis for commercial and leadership decisions.
- ✓ Build on the existing CVR timetable, ownership model, preparation standards and review process, strengthening them where this will improve reliability, clarity or decision-making.
- ✓ Work with Commercial and project teams to test contract value, cost-to-complete, variation, risk, opportunity and margin assumptions.
- ✓ Reconcile CVR information appropriately to Finance records and explain material differences.
- ✓ Ensure WIP is understood, evidenced, appropriately valued, reviewed and actively managed.
- ✓ Identify margin movements, forecast changes and project risks early, with clear ownership and action.
- ✓ Improve the quality and consistency of project source information and reduce key-person workarounds.

Forecasting, reporting and business insight

3. Forecasting, Budgeting and Cash Visibility

- ✓ Lead integrated and regularly refreshed forecasts for revenue, cost, margin, overhead, cash and working capital.
- ✓ Reconcile operational project forecasts with the financial position and investigate discrepancies.
- ✓ Create clear assumptions, ownership and version control for forecasts and budgets.
- ✓ Provide timely visibility of cash requirements, receipts, payments, debtors and material sensitivities.
- ✓ Use scenarios and trend analysis to help leaders understand likely outcomes and management choices.

4. Management Information, Reporting and Business Insight

- ✓ Deliver accurate monthly management accounts and leadership reporting to an agreed timetable.
- ✓ Keep reporting concise, consistent and focused on decisions rather than volume.
- ✓ Explain what happened, why it happened, what is likely to happen next and what action is required.
- ✓ Highlight material variances, project movements, risks, opportunities and cash implications.
- ✓ Support Board and leadership discussions with clear analysis and professionally presented information.

- ✓ Improve the reliability, accessibility and usefulness of management information.

Decision-useful reporting

The standard is not simply accuracy. Reporting must also be timely, concise, forward-looking and clear about the action required.

Systems, people, partnering and leadership support

5. Finance Processes, Systems, Controls and Continuous Improvement

- ✓ Map critical Finance processes, clarify ownership and document proportionate controls.
- ✓ Use Xero, HubSpot and workflow-management systems effectively, reducing avoidable manual intervention.
- ✓ Improve data quality, system discipline, source information and single-source-of-truth practices.
- ✓ Prioritise improvements according to risk, value and practicality.

6. Finance Team Leadership, Development and Resilience

- ✓ Set clear responsibilities, priorities, service standards and accountabilities.
- ✓ Manage workload and deadlines across routine delivery and improvement activity.
- ✓ Provide feedback, coaching, support and appropriate challenge.
- ✓ Create cross-training, documented procedures and cover for critical activities.

7. Commercial and Operational Business Partnering

- ✓ Build visible, accessible and productive relationships with Finance, Commercial, project delivery, procurement and leadership colleagues.
- ✓ Spend sufficient time with operational and project teams to understand the information behind reported performance, attend relevant project and performance reviews, and bring a practical financial perspective to decisions.
- ✓ Help non-finance colleagues understand WIP, margin, cash and forecast movements.
- ✓ Challenge assumptions constructively and focus discussion on facts, risks, options and action.

8. Board, Managing Director and External Adviser Support

- ✓ Provide clear, reliable and forward-looking financial information.
- ✓ Escalate material financial risks, control concerns and forecast movements promptly.
- ✓ Support budgeting, strategic planning, investment decisions and performance reviews.
- ✓ Manage auditor, tax, bank and adviser relationships.

What Success Looks Like

Success will be judged by sustained improvements in the reliability, usefulness and resilience of financial information and control, while maintaining dependable day-to-day delivery.

1. CVRs and WIP can be trusted

- ✓ CVRs are accurate, timely, consistently prepared and constructively challenged.
- ✓ CVR information reconciles appropriately to Finance records.
- ✓ WIP is understood, evidenced, appropriately valued and actively managed.
- ✓ Project risks, opportunities and margin movements are identified and communicated early.

2. Forecasts look forward and drive action

- ✓ Revenue, cash, cost and margin forecasts are reliable, refreshed regularly and clearly owned.
- ✓ Operational forecasts and the financial position are reconciled.
- ✓ Material assumptions and sensitivities are visible.
- ✓ Leaders understand likely outcomes and act early.

3. Reporting is timely, concise and decision-useful

- ✓ Management accounts and leadership reporting are accurate and delivered to an agreed timetable.
- ✓ Reporting explains what happened, why, what is likely next and what action is required.
- ✓ The Board and leadership team receive a clear forward-looking view of performance.

4. Financial controls are strong and proportionate

- ✓ Month-end processes, reconciliations, approvals and audit trails are current and repeatable.
- ✓ Core processes are documented and work consistently under pressure.
- ✓ Systems are used effectively and avoidable manual intervention reduces.

5. Finance is connected to projects and commercial decisions

- ✓ Finance works dynamically with Commercial and project teams.
- ✓ Financial implications are considered early in decisions.
- ✓ Challenge is constructive, evidence-based and focused on better outcomes.

6. The Finance team is capable, resilient and well led

- ✓ Responsibilities, priorities and standards are clear.
- ✓ Team members are supported, developed and held accountable.
- ✓ Critical activities have appropriate cross-training and cover.
- ✓ The function does not depend on unsustainable individual effort.

Confidence is the outcome

The Board and leadership team should have confidence both in the numbers and in the financial control environment that produces them.

Support, Onboarding and the First 90 Days

The first 90 days are designed to build understanding, relationships and control. The successful candidate will have access to business context, available documentation and key colleagues across Finance, Commercial, procurement, project delivery and leadership. Initial priorities and decision rights will be agreed with the Managing Director and Fractional Finance Director, with regular review points to resolve obstacles, test progress and maintain a manageable improvement agenda.

Days 1-30: Understand and connect

- ✓ Understand COEL's business model, project lifecycle and commercial rhythms.
- ✓ Build relationships across Finance, Commercial, project delivery, procurement and leadership.
- ✓ Review the Finance calendar, month-end, CVR, WIP, forecasting and reporting routines.
- ✓ Understand the Finance team's responsibilities, workload, capability and resilience.
- ✓ Identify immediate control, cash, reporting or compliance priorities.

Days 31-60: Confirm priorities and stabilise

- ✓ Validate the most material risks, dependencies and data-quality issues.
- ✓ Agree practical standards and ownership for critical recurring processes.
- ✓ Stabilise priority reporting or control activities where required.
- ✓ Identify quick wins that reduce friction or improve visibility without disrupting delivery.

Days 61-90: Agree and begin the roadmap

- ✓ Agree a prioritised improvement roadmap with the Managing Director and relevant leaders.
- ✓ Set measurable outcomes, owners, milestones and review points.
- ✓ Begin implementation of the highest-value improvements.
- ✓ Confirm the team development, cross-training and resilience plan.

Support available

The Financial Controller will receive structured onboarding, access to available business and Finance documentation, introductions to key operational and project colleagues, and regular prioritisation discussions with the Managing Director and Fractional Finance Director. Relevant leaders will support access to information, reinforce agreed accountabilities and help remove barriers to cross-functional improvement.

Person Specification

Professional Qualification

Applicants should hold an ACA, ACCA or CIMA qualification. Another recognised accountancy qualification may be considered where it provides equivalent professional standing and relevant technical breadth.

Essential Technical and Leadership Experience

- ✓ Strong financial control, month-end, management-reporting and year-end statutory reporting experience.
- ✓ Practical experience of project accounting, CVRs, WIP, cost-to-complete or comparable project-based controls.
- ✓ Experience producing and challenging forecasts for revenue, cost, margin and cash.
- ✓ Evidence of turning financial information into clear business insight and action.
- ✓ Experience improving Finance processes, controls, data quality and systems use.
- ✓ Evidence of leading and developing a Finance team, setting clear expectations and supporting accountability.
- ✓ Confidence working with senior leaders, commercial colleagues and operational teams.
- ✓ Ability to operate at both detailed and strategic levels.

Personal Attributes

- ✓ Technically credible and commercially minded.
- ✓ Hands-on, curious and willing to investigate underlying information.
- ✓ Clear, concise and able to explain financial issues to non-finance colleagues.
- ✓ Constructive in challenge and willing to address difficult issues.
- ✓ Calm, resilient and able to manage competing deadlines.
- ✓ Practical and proportionate, with a bias towards sustainable improvement.

Desirable Sector and Systems Experience

- ✓ Experience in construction, fit-out, contracting, engineering or another environment with comparable project accounting, work-in-progress and cost-to-complete disciplines.
- ✓ Experience working with quantity surveyors, project managers or commercial teams.
- ✓ Familiarity with Xero, Excel and Microsoft 365.
- ✓ Experience of finance transformation, automation, reporting tools or improved data integration.

Candidate Fit

This role is likely to suit	This role is unlikely to suit
• A Finance leader who enjoys improving a business while maintaining dependable delivery. • Someone who moves confidently between detailed investigation and strategic discussion. • A trusted colleague who offers constructive challenge and builds effective relationships. • A hands-on leader who develops capability and clear ownership in others. • Someone practical and composed when working through ambiguity and competing priorities.	• Someone seeking a predominantly technical or remote Finance position with limited engagement across the business. • Someone who expects processes to be fully mature or prefers not to work through ambiguity. • Someone who is unwilling to remain close enough to the detail to assure quality and understand risk. • Someone who avoids difficult issues or introduces controls without considering operational impact.



Recruitment Process and Assessment Focus

Application route and recruitment portal:	https://system.citrushr.com/Job?uid=nksprswzavourmxoxswo
Application closing date:	16 October 2026
Initial MS Teams / first-stage interviews:	Week commencing 19 October 2026 ¹
Second-stage interviews:	Week commencing 26 October 2026 ¹

Application	Submit a current CV and a concise covering letter through the recruitment portal. The covering letter should briefly explain your interest in the role and provide two or three relevant examples demonstrating your experience of project accounting, CVRs, WIP or comparable project controls; forecasting and cash visibility; financial control and reporting; Finance team leadership; or collaboration with commercial and operational colleagues. Please make your own contribution and the outcome clear.
First stage	Microsoft Teams interview exploring motivation, career evidence and understanding of the role. The discussion will assess communication, leadership approach, commercial awareness and the candidate's ability to build trust, challenge constructively and operate as a full member of the Operational Leadership Team.
Second stage	In-person structured interview and practical exercise using project and financial information relevant to the role. Candidates will be asked to identify material issues, test assumptions, prioritise risks, explain their judgement and recommend proportionate action. The interview will also explore Finance team leadership, cross-functional working and contribution to the Operational Leadership Team. Clear instructions and reasonable preparation time will be provided in advance.

Priority Assessment Areas

Project accounting, CVR and WIP: works collaboratively with established information to test assumptions and support early visibility of margin risk.

Forecasting and insight: develops credible forward views and translates assumptions and sensitivities into practical action.

Financial control: maintains and develops dependable month-end, reconciliation, reporting & statutory disciplines.

Team leadership: supports team development, clear accountability and resilience across the function.

Commercial partnering: builds on existing relationships and provides constructive, evidence-based challenge on assumptions, ownership and performance.

Improvement judgement: recognises what already works and prioritises further development according to risk, value and operational impact.

COEL is committed to fair and inclusive recruitment. Reasonable adjustments are available throughout the process.

¹ With the potential to call forward for the right candidate